

The 1967 Kerner Commission on Civil Disorders leveled an accusing finger at the news media for its role in alternately ignoring and abusing the minority situation in the U.S. and for contributing to the atmosphere of racial tension without actually addressing the grievances of the minority community.¹ [[United States. Report of the National Advisory Commission On Civil Disorders. (New York: The New York Times Company, 1968). pp. 382ff.]]

The purpose of this paper is to look at the treatment that the Chicano community has received from the Anglo Press and to work towards a Chicano response, keeping in mind two fundamental beliefs of the Anglo Press.

A short history of the media coverage afforded the Chicano community is quite possible because, with the exception of periodic "Race Riots" and other disturbances, the Chicano community did not exist in Anglo news media before the 1960's. Felix Gutierrez writes:

A survey of magazine citations in the Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature from 1890 to 1970 reveals very few article about Latinos in the United States. Articles that were listed often had a crisis or negative overtone. That is, they were written during periods when Mexican labor or immigration impacted national policy or when Latinos were involved in civil strife.² [[Felix Gutierrez. "Latinos and the Media" in Readings in Mass Communications: Concepts & Issues in the Mass Media. 5th edition. eds., Micheal Emery and Ted Curtis. (Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown Publishers, 1983). p. 165.]]

Thus, for the Anglo press, media coverage of the Chicano community began in 1848 as a brief footnote regarding some desert territory won in a military skirmish. The media coverage then fell silent, with the exception of periodic memos regarding a few troublemakers, until the said troublemakers became unavoidably audible during the 1960's.

What was the Anglo news media's reaction to the now vocal Chicano community? One time Los Angeles Times writer, Ruben Salazar once noted:

The media, having ignored the Mexican-Americans for so long, but now willing to report them, seem impatient about the complexities of the story. It's as if the media, having finally discovered the Mexican-American is not amused that under the serape and sombrero is a complex Chicano instead of a potential Gringo.³ [[Gutierrez. p. 166.]]

In a nutshell, the Chicano complaint is that the Anglo Press not only ignores the issues that are important to the Chicano

community but habitually portray the Chicano community in a poor light. Felix Gutierrez writes:

"Coverage of Latinos in Anglo media has increased with the population growth [of Latinos]. But news reporters still tend to place too much emphasis on stories featuring "problem people"---Latinos either causing or beset by problems, such as undocumented residents, youth gangs, or recent arrivals. Other stories often have a "zoo appeal" by featuring Latinos on national holidays, celebrating cultural fiestas, or in their native costumes. While more examples of accurate news reporting can be found now than in earlier periods, the media's preoccupation with "problem people" and "zoo stories" ignores many of the important daily happenings in the Latino community. 4[[Gutierrez. p. 166.]]

The complaint is this: though the Chicano community has been a part of this country's heritage for a long time (predating Jamestown) and though Chicanos have given their lives in this country's wars, something as simple as acknowledging their egalitarian existence seems forever beyond their reach.⁵ [[David Villar Ruiz. A Soul in Exile: A Chicano Lost in Occupied Land. (Los Angeles: Vantage Press, 1981). Bookends with Richard Rodriguez's Hunger for Memory. A Chicano heading in the other direction---from the turbulent Vietnam years to a search for ethnic identity---a diary of la marcha de la Reconquista.

The fear and helplessness, the brutality and raw-racism of the police, the bitter sense of betrayal from a man that had risked his life for his country in a Southeast Asia and now was paid back with second class citizenship. It approaches the early Chicano movement on a personal level which dovetails nicely with Lewels' academic The Uses of the Media by the Chicano Movement.]]

. . . And in their day to day existence they are reminded of this fact by the continued absence of their presence, as anything other than troublemakers, in the Anglo press. Very much parallel to the treatment of the Black community by the Anglo press, statements made in the 1967 Kerner Commission Report could be applied to the Chicano community:

The media report and write from the standpoint of a white man's world. The ills of the ghetto, the difficulties of life there, the Negro's burning sense of grievance, are seldom conveyed. Slights and indignities are part of the Negro's daily life, and many of them come from what he now calls "the white man's press"---a press that repeatedly, if unconsciously, reflects the biases, the paternalism, the indifference of white America. This may be understandable, but it is not excusable in an

institution that has the mission to inform and educate the whole of our society. . . . Most newspaper articles and most television programming ignore the fact that an appreciable part of their audience is black. The world that television and newspapers offer to their black audience is almost totally white, in both appearance and attitude.⁶ [[United States. Report of the National Advisory Commission On Civil Disorders. (New York: The New York Times Company, 1968). pp. 366, 383.]]

For the Anglo, however, the problem isn't so much equal time in the Press but that the Chicano community seems adamant about not assimilating. Francisco Lewels writes:

When Dr. Jack Forbes, sociologist, testified at the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights hearing in San Antonio, Texas in 1968, he was asked by the General Counsel, "Why hasn't the Mexican-American assimilated in the Southwest?" he answered, "Excuse me, sir, but that is the wrong question. Why hasn't the Anglo assimilated?"

Perhaps the point Forbes was trying to make was that not only are Mexican-Americans equal in numbers in some places in the Southwest to the Anglos, but they were there first and, whereas most can speak some English, relatively few Anglos can speak Spanish.⁷ [[Francisco J. Lewels, Jr. The Uses of the Media by the Chicano Movement: A Study in Minority Access. (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974). p. 10.]]

For the Anglo and the Anglo press, their culture is the American culture. And not only is their culture the American culture, but being the American culture it is the superior culture.

[Our society] equates Anglo-American origin and Anglo-American ways with virtue, with goodness, even with political purity. Other cultures are not merely different; they are inferior. They must be wiped out, not only for the good of the country, but for the good of the child. Not only must he learn to speak English; he must stop speaking anything else.⁸ [[ibid.]]

Those are not the words of some neo-Nazi but of the former U.S. Commissioner of Education, Harold Howe II. The Anglo culture suffers from an unfortunate strain of color blindness that associates only white with right. And as long as it is under the influence of this myopia they simply cannot see the difference between their Anglo culture and the mythical American "melting pot."

There are two factors that I see standing in the way of the Chicano community getting fair treatment in the Anglo news media. The first is this confused identification of the "American Way"

with the Anglo culture. The second is with regards to the myth of objectivity that the modern news media foists upon the reading public.

The press . . . must print the truth fully and fearlessly. It must not print biased propaganda as news. It must give the public accurate information. It must open columns to free and illuminating discussion. It must do its full and impartial duty in enabling the citizenry to conduct their democratic government wisely and successfully." [Edmond D. Coblentz, ed. Newsman Speak. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1954). p. 41.]

The First Commandment of the Fourth Estate, in the words of William Randolph Hearst, is objectivity. Objectivity is the cornerstone of the modern news media. If anyone should know about the modern news media it would have been William Randolph Hearst. He certainly owned enough newspapers to put his principles into practice. Observe, for example, how he handled the Los Angeles Race Riots in the 1940's:

Guy Endore, one of the chief protagonists for the Sleepy Lagoon Defense Committee, maintains that the crime wave was the result of a directive from Hearst himself to all Hearst editors. According to Endore the teletype message from Hearst read:

" . . . Chief suggest L.A. editors make survey of crime reports---all types---with particular emphasis on numbers of police bookings of Mexican and Negro citizens---and or aliens. Chief suggests L.A. editors transmit findings to all other Hearst editors."

Even though there was no actual evidence of a crime wave among Chicano youth, the press was able to fabricate one by running sensationalized stories and getting 'stooges,' prominent personalities anxious for publicity, to make statements about Mexican crime.

" . . . even if there is no Mexican crime, there's nothing to stop you from printing what these prominent citizens are saying about Mexican crime, even if it is to the effect that it is nothing to be worried about. All this is printed under some sort of scare headline calculated to give the hurried reader the impression that Mexican crime is a real problem."¹⁰ [Alfredo Miranda. The Chicano Experience: An Alternative Perspective. (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985). p. 79.]

Well, obviously, objectivity is in the eye of the beholder. Dan Schiller writes in a book titled, Objectivity And the News:

An invisible frame brackets news reports as a particular kind of public knowledge and a key category in popular epistemology. News reports repeatedly claim that, ideally at least, they recount events without the intrusion of value judgements or symbols. News is a map, a veridical representation, a report on reality, and hence not really a story at all, but merely the facts---this is the claim. But news---akin to any literary or cultural form---must rely upon conventions. Formally created and substantially embodied conventions alone can be used to contrive the illusion of objectivity. How else could we recognize news as a form of knowledge?¹¹ [[Dan Schiller. Objectivity And the News: The Public and the Rise of Commercial Journalism. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981). pp. 1-2.]]

Reality is a multi-directional multi-sensual phenomenon. News writing is a linear abstraction of this multi-directional multi-sensual phenomenon. Something of the Reality is stripped away and something of the writer is added in its conversion to becoming a "news story." More specifically, our cognition and therefore our recording of the Reality is at best an approximation of the Reality. There are more accurate and less accurate approximations, but in all cases, something is stripped away and something is added.¹² [[I operate as a writer under the philosophy of Fairness. That is, because true objectivity is an impossibility, than in an atmosphere of controversy or non-resolution, major points of view should be aired with special attention toward their Emic values. I have adapted this view from that of Joseph Farrar, Executive News Editor of the Los Angeles Herald Examiner.]]

Is it surprising then that the Anglo news media reflects the prejudices, interests or ideas of the Anglo culture (although it may be more accurate to identify these prejudices, interests or ideas with its buying public)? Would anyone be surprised that if the shoe were on the other foot and the Chicano media were in a position of dominance that it would reflect the prejudices, interests or ideas of the associated Chicano culture? Therefore, the Chicano's cry of unfair to the Anglo news media is true only in terms of the Anglo news media's claim to complete objectivity.

So the Anglo news media stands behind its ill-conceived belief in the "American Way" and the "Myth of Objectivity," all the while telling the Chicano community that denial of the Chicano community's heritage is required before it can become anything more, for example, than a crime story for the Metro section of the Los Angeles Times.

With such an ultimatum is it any wonder that the Chicano community rioted in the late 60's? Such is the dilemma for those of us that would live a bi-cultural life in a uni-cultural society. Assimilate or segregate. But as the Kerner Commission

found in the late 60's, neither course will create the kind of response that would satisfy the Chicano community. Both responses render the Chicano culture as being something inferior to the dominant Anglo culture, the first by robbing the Chicano of his ethnic heritage and the second by denying the Chicano access to the cultural mainstream. ¹³ [[Tom Wicker writes in the Introduction to the Report of the National Advisory Commission On Civil Disorders (p. vii):

Conceivably the nation could continue its present failing efforts toward an integrated society, including the present proportion of its resources devoted to social and economic programs; or it could abandon integration as a goal and commit increased resources to "enrichment" of life in the ghetto---thus presumably making it bearable without producing violence against white society.

The first of these is hopeless; not only will it tend to produce more and more ghetto violence but it is an obvious fraud, in terms of its ability to produce anything like integration

The second course is rejected here with equal frankness, as simply another method of producing a permanently divided society.]]

With regards to the Chicano community and the Anglo news media, I have to reject any view that would call for the assimilation of the Chicano into the Anglo press or the other view that would be satisfied with an alternative Press. For the same reasons listed above in terms of ones ethnic identity such an either/or approach perpetuates the "Chicano/inferiority" myth.

As such I believe that the course of action to take is integration without assimilation. Integration without assimilation is socially revisionistic. Beginning from a position of personally appreciating our personal ethnic heritage (which we alone bear the responsibility of educating ourselves in) and recognizing the foreign nature of the dominant culture and the paradigms that its News Media operates under, integration without assimilation adds one more facet to the heterogeneous nature of the dominant culture. Los Angeles Times editorial writer, Frank del Olmo urges Chicano activists:

Try to understand the inner workings of the media, and to cooperate with reporters and editors rather than criticizing them. I also advise against confrontational-style tactics, such as boycotts, which can be counterproductive.

If the news media are going to change, the most effective pressure for change will come from inside the profession, among journalists themselves, rather than from outside pressure groups. And the best way to make the news media more sensitive to minority groups is to

have more Latinos and other minority people in the newsroom.¹⁴ [[Frank del Olmo. "Changing World: Latinos and the Media." Los Angeles Times. April 24, 1987. part II, p. 13.]]

This tactic is often criticized for being ineffective. Salvador Valdez wrote a letter to the El Paso Times after a Mexican Independence Day demonstration in 1972:

The local papers have only a few Spanish surnames to add color to their staff. But these reporters are like worms inside holes who cannot come out because their heads are cut off by their racist editors. Therefore, they move ineffectively underground.¹⁵ [[Lewels. p. 45.]]

But the fact of the matter is, with only eight percent of those working within the ranks of profession journalism coming from minority communities (not mentioning how small the Chicano representation is) from a national population of 18%, the infiltration or integration without assimilation tactic has not been fully implemented. Granted, it is a very slow method with all of the limitations of working within a foreign framework. But this method is more realistic, having better long range benefits, in view of the fact that it reflects the kind of dialogue that must take place on a social/cultural level between the Anglo culture and the other ethnic cultures. In a society that calls itself Democratic, the rights must be balanced with the responsibilities between and within groups, or else we will always have the kind of divided society that sparked the Anger of 1967 riots.¹⁶ [[del Olmo. part II, p. 13.]]

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in America in that he does not fit too well into anyones labeling system.

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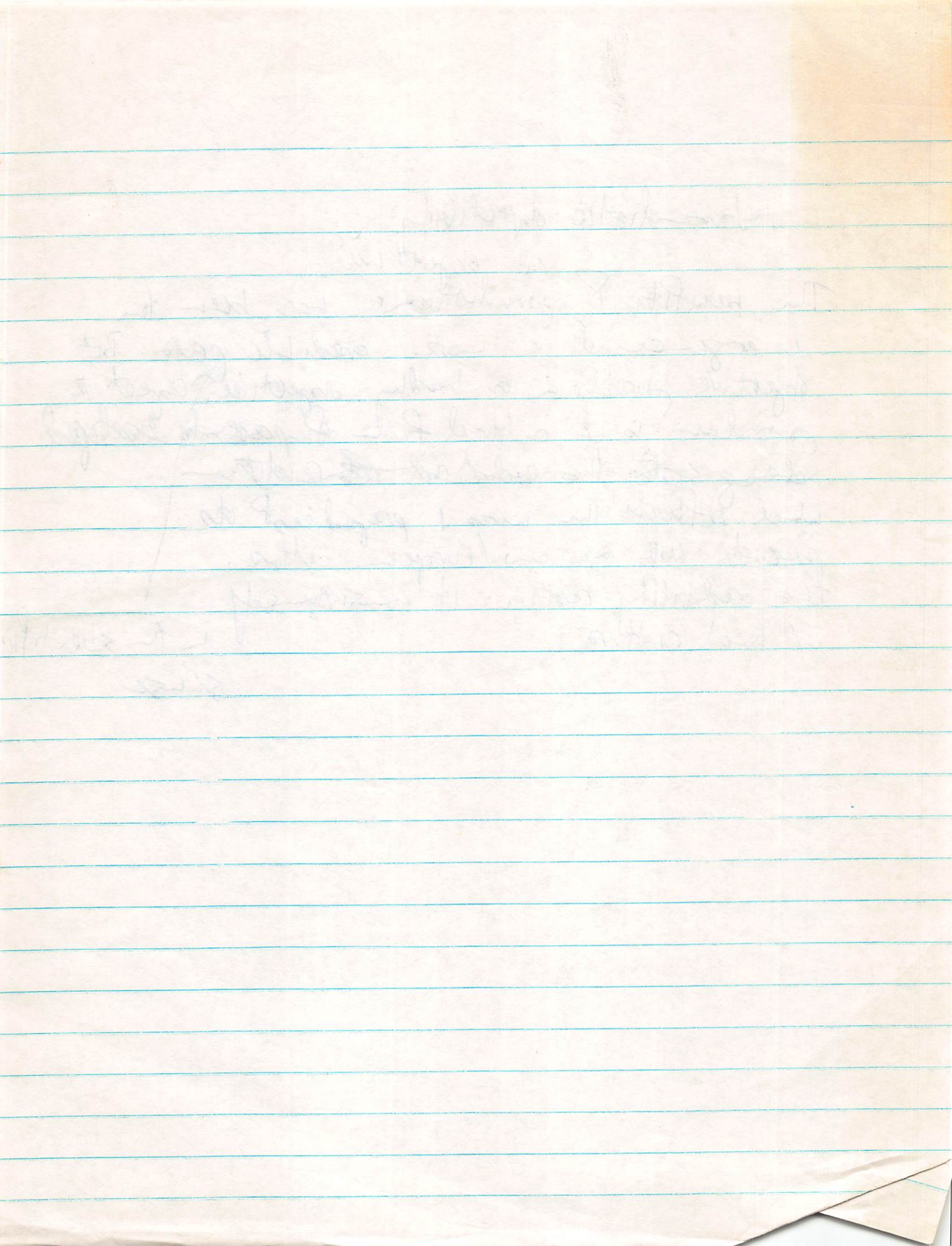
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United States. Report of the National Advisory Commission On Civil Disorders. (New York: The New York Times Company, 1968). Government documents are never a breeze to read and this one is no exception. This document, however, is a good source for depicting the concern that white America had for the violence that was growing across the nation.

Journalistic objectivity

The benefits of ^{an objective} journalism has been the emergence of a more credible press. But objective journalism is hardly objective. Objective journalism is a cultural form ~~independently~~ developed ~~along side the~~ ~~admitted~~ ~~of~~ ~~condition~~ which reflects the mores & prejudices of its parent North American / European culture. Its credibility rests in its consistency w/ that culture.

↳ the scientific
style



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"Thus my argument, in part, is this: Today's news is indeed biased---as it must inevitably be---and this bias can be best understood by understanding the concept, the conventions, and the ethic of objectivity." p 13

ideology of the news: "rooted in a positivist view of the world, an enduring commitment to the supremacy of observable and retrievable facts." p. 13

1. OBJECTIVE NEWS IS BIASED

1. biased against the watchdog role, an adversary press, Fourth Estate; Alvin Gouldner "managers of the status quo"
2. biased against the independent thinking, emasculates the intellect by treating it as a disinterested spectator.
3. biased against the very idea of responsibility, "the day's news is viewed as something journalists are compelled to report, not something they are responsible for creating." p. 13. . . . "Despite a renewed interest in professional ethics, the discussion continues to evade questions of morality and responsibility. Of course, this doesn't mean that journalists are immoral. Rather, it means that journalists today are largely amoral. Objectivity in journalism effectively erodes the very foundation on which rests a responsible press." p. 14.

2. OBJECTIVE NEWS, A HISTORY:

"By most accounts of the history of objectivity in journalism, objective reporting began more as a commercial imperative than as a standard of responsible reporting. With the emergence of a truly popular press in the mid-1800s---the penny press---a press tied neither to the political parties nor the business elite, objectivity provided a presumably disinterested view of the world." p. 14.

1. TECHNOLOGY/MARKET DRIVEN: advent of the telegraph (AP, early effort to monopolize a new technology), steam-powered and rotary printing press, rise of the cities/demise of communities . . . "These are some of the many conditions that created the climate for objective reporting, a climate best understood in terms of the emergence of a new mass medium and the need for that medium to operate efficiently in the marketplace." p. 14

"To survive in the marketplace, and to enhance their status as a new and more democratic press, journalists---

Alison, Thomas L. The Ethics of Journalism, 1984, pp. 13-14.

"This my argument, in part, is that there is a new in the press -- it is not necessarily new, but it is new in the sense of being understood by understanding the concept of the conventional, and the effect of objectivity, p. 13

theory of the news: "It is a new view of the world, in addition to the old view of the world, and the old view is still there, p. 13

1. OBJECTIVE NEWS IS DEAD

1.1. I have argued the whole case in my previous work, Fourth Estate: A New Journal, 1984, pp. 13-14

1.2. I have argued the whole case in my previous work, Fourth Estate: A New Journal, 1984, pp. 13-14

1.3. I have argued the whole case in my previous work, Fourth Estate: A New Journal, 1984, pp. 13-14

2. OBJECTIVE NEWS: A HISTORY

2.1. The most accurate of the history of objectivity in journalism, objective reporting began with the commercial imperative of a daily popular press in the mid-19th century. The daily press was then and is now the most powerful political party in the business of the world, and it provided a press which was the most powerful of the world, p. 13

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principally publishers, who were becoming more and more removed from the editing and writing process---began to transform efficiency into a standard of professional competence, a standard later --- several decades later --- described as objectivity." p. 14

2. TWO TWENTIETH CENTURY DEVELOPMENTS:

1919, Oliver Wendell Holmes' effort to employ a marketplace metaphor to define the meaning of the First Amendment; "the marketplace of ideas" per John Milton; "their opportunity to compete and ultimately survive in the marketplace is their First Amendment right, a Constitutional privilege." p. 14

Growing popularity of the scientific method as the proper tool with which to discover and understand an increasingly alien culture; interview official credible sources, juxtaposing conflicting truth-claims---"These are the conventions sociologist Gaye Tuchman describes as a kind of strategy journalists use to deflect criticism, the same kind of strategy social scientists use to defend the quality of their work." p. 14